

In Madagascar, migration is mostly rural migration to other rural areas. They are driven by growing difficulties related to demographic densities and high levels of poverty. Migrants search for jobs and land, and struggle to open up new land frontiers. For spontaneous migration to be successful, a favourable environment is needed. This provides a major role to play by public policies, which can support a more balanced territorial development through the adequate provision of public goods and the improvement of land access conditions.

THE PREVALENCE OF RURAL-RURAL MIGRATION:  
THE SEARCH FOR LAND

In Madagascar, internal migration has been fostered since the beginning of the 20th century by political, religious, climatic and economic drivers. Whatever their forms – constrained, organized or spontaneous – they have contributed to the formation of national identity and human geography. Nowadays, and contrary to other African countries, this internal migration does not fuel a massive rural depopulation. Rural-to-urban migration has increased progressively, but internal migration remains essentially from rural to other rural areas. Urban growth mainly results from natural growth and from the administrative re-classification of municipalities from rural to urban.

Despite the existing reserves of arable land across the country, the average farm size is decreasing – a result of unbalanced population and demographic growth. By extrapolating the trends observed in the last two agricultural censuses (1984 and 2004), the average farm size could be expected to halve over a 40-year period, from 1.2 ha in 1984 to 0.61 ha in 2024. Where the population density is high (more than 100 hab/km²) and forests have already been cleared, land is fully occupied and subdivided to the extent that plots cannot be further divided for inheritances. In a 2011 survey of 1 860 households in 4 regions, 25% of youth that were born and farming locally did not inherit: they had no other option than to buy land, knowing that good quality land is expensive (notably for rice production). Land markets are active but segmented and embedded in family and neighbour networks. In rural areas, 83% of the households live on less than \$1.25 per day. Therefore, the only way to accumulate capital for investment is through seasonal or full time activities (in agriculture, charcoal production or mining) or/and to seek available and affordable land somewhere else.

MIGRATION AS A CHOICE OR A LAST RESORT?

Willingness to migrate differs according to location. For people from the South, migration is part of life's trajectories. Although a departure might

be triggered by a harsh climate, life conditions and frequent political instability are the main drivers for migration. Youth deliberately go to the western and northern forested areas of the country to look for jobs, clear the land and produce charcoal, and then negotiate land access with local communities. People generally leave when population density is high and farm sizes are collapsing. This is the case in the highlands (central regions) where people consider leaving their village as the last option.

Rural areas are most often preferred to cities because they are perceived as offering better job opportunities (e.g. daily work in rice transplanting and harvesting) than urban centres where the competition is tough. Because of the limited manufacturing sector, petty jobs in the informal sector are the rule (handlers, street sellers) and candidates are many: about 400 000 youth are attaining the working age every year. In that context, dynamic agricultural areas retain a strong attractiveness (such as Marovoay and Ambatondrazaka, in the Boeny and Alaotra Mangoro regions). However, when they migrate, people retain control of their small agricultural plots (if any) in their villages of origin. These plots can be farmed by family members, and they remain both an alternative and a way for maintaining social and identity links with the land of their ancestors.

Few areas remain with agricultural land reserves and potential for hosting numerous migrants. The well-known historical land frontiers (like the Alaotra lake basin) are now fully occupied and deforested. In these places, the oldest migrant families regard themselves as being natives there and have stopped sending the remains of their deceased back to their villages of origin for funerals. Land reserves which are likely to offer potential for a new agricultural frontier are limited (the Sofia and the Diana regions and areas to the east of the Amoron'i Mania or Matsiatra Ambony regions), and constitute probably less than 10 million hectares. These are remote areas with harsh and highly insecure environments (absence of public services, crime, and cattle theft). Few migrants desire, or are able, to settle new farms by their own in these large plains dedicated to extensive cattle farming. It is easier and more profitable to practise slash and burn activities closer to existing villages and public infrastructure.

REBALANCING UNEVEN POPULATION THROUGH  
LOCAL DEVELOPMENT

The strong heterogeneity of regional demographic densities results in overpopulated areas with strong impacts on rural livelihoods, poverty levels and natural resources, on one side, and marginalized regions with limited infrastructure on the other side. These different polarities are both drivers of, and constraints against, migration.

Since the 1970s, several development projects launched by the government or NGOs have attempted to unlock these territorial unbalances and initiate organized migration. However, the focus was placed on land access only and did not pay enough attention to the conditions necessary to establish a community and to develop a farm. These projects failed notably due to the absence of job opportunities, solidarity networks, infrastructure, and public services, including the rule of law providing protection against armed robbery. However, during the same period of time, several spontaneous migration dynamics were active, spreading to other regions and developing new agricultural plots in forested areas.

These different past processes can inform public policies and help to identify ways for rebalancing territorial dynamics. The first is to supplement spontaneous migration with the adequate provision of public goods in remote areas (infrastructure and public services). This implies: (i) the implementation of a land policy framework, with new tools to secure land access to herders, and the need to stop considering that non-cultivated land is not owned; (ii) a reinvestment in strategic thinking about agricultural development models and the respective roles of corporate investment and family farming, which offer different opportunities with different impacts, notably on employment, depending on the local context; and (iii) the reengagement of participatory approaches, avoiding top-down practices, and supporting local stakeholders in the management of migration and agriculture development. The second way is to support rural development. Many young people want to stay in their own areas and they deserve decent living conditions. This implies secured land access, improvement and diversification of agricultural production systems (yields and crops), a diversification of rural activities (transformation of products), and access to services through investment in small towns and regional cities.

Fig. 9.1: Characteristics of migrant households in surveyed regions (2011 – 2016)

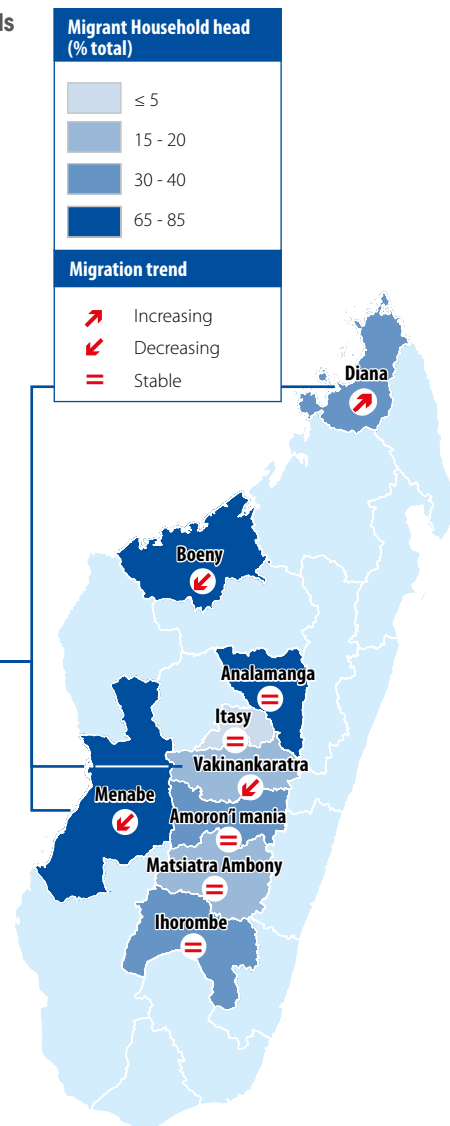
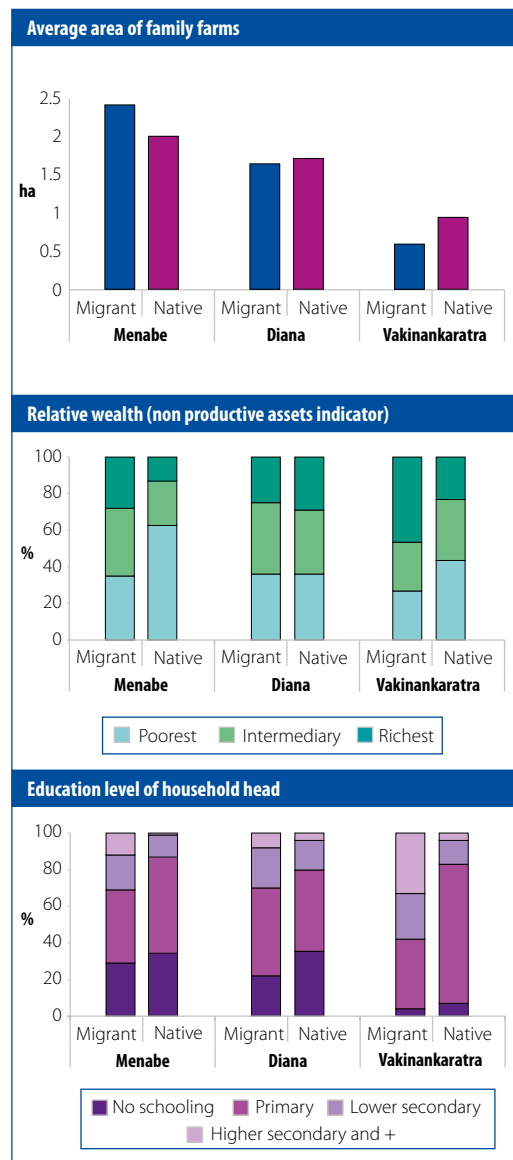


Fig. 9.2: Population density (2012) and importance of migration

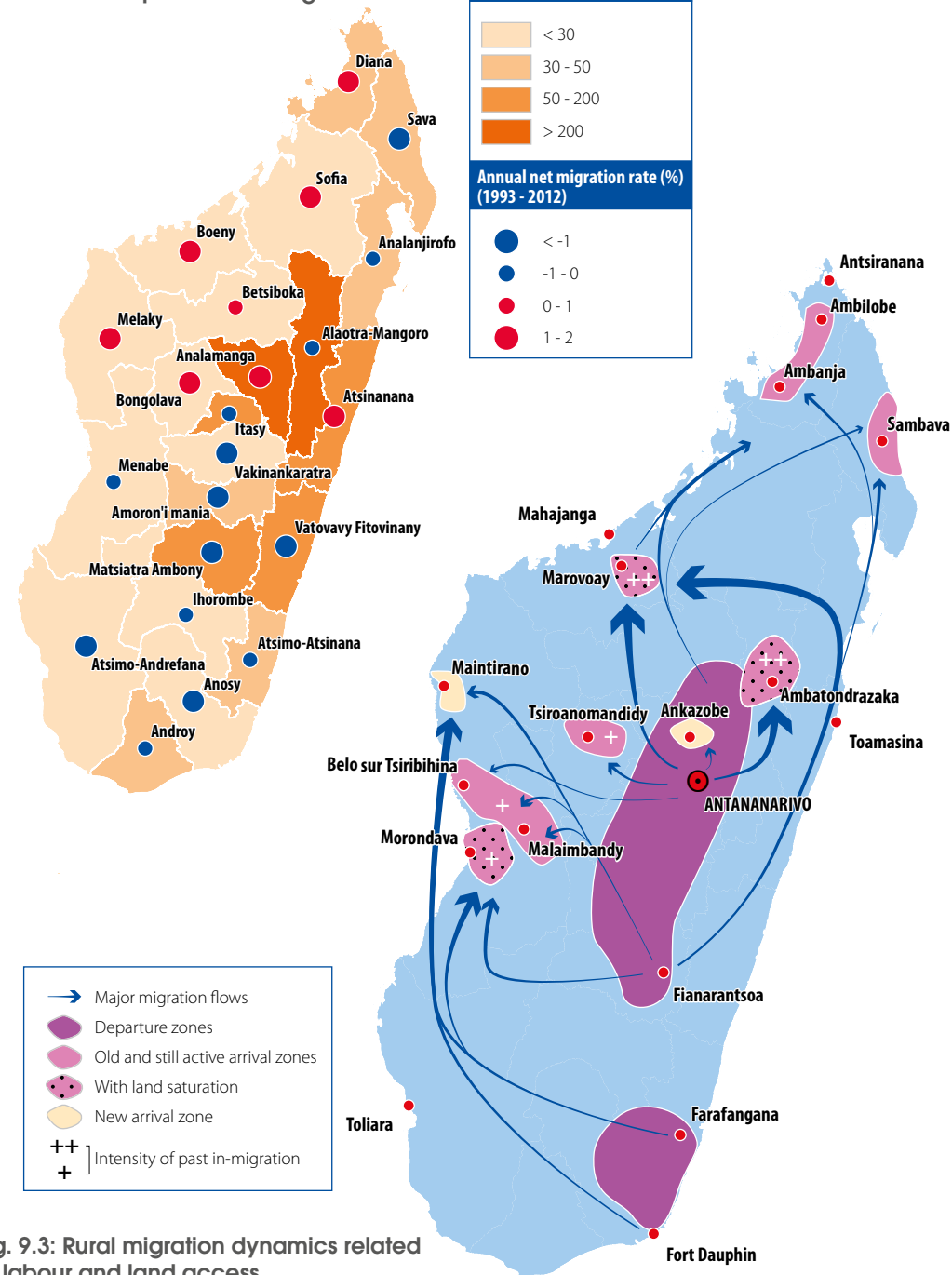


Fig. 9.3: Rural migration dynamics related to labour and land access